

HOOKEDNOW

DAVE SKIP RICK
HUGHES-MORRIS-HAFELE

WELCOME to the October-November issue of *HookedNow*.

Feel free to contact us if you have any questions or comments at: sweltsa@frontier.com
(include "HookedNow" in the subject line for quicker replies).

Fall has fallen once again. Without a doubt October and November produce some of our favorite fishing of the year, but conditions change quickly this time of year and you need to be ready to change your tactics with them. One method that can produce large fish anytime of year, but especially in the fall, is fishing with streamers. Streamer patterns represent some of the trout's biggest food items and thus attract some of the biggest trout in a stream or lake. So when you are tired of fishing size 22 midges or tiny blue-winged olives, tie on a streamer and see what happens. You might be more than surprised. HAPPY CASTS!

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Photo by Rick Hafele



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SKIP MORRIS – STREAMER PATTERNS & TACKLE

Photo by Carol Ann Morris



Several years ago I declared war on streamer fishing--I was determined to figure it out and make it work or die trying. (Okay, that's a little over the top...the point is, I meant business.) I'd been fishing streamers occasionally for years up to that point, but never really seriously. Then the urge took me and I started dabbling, grew ever more serious about this valuable approach to trout-river fishing until I was in full battle with it, and found myself catching some fish that shocked me a little. (That's often how I progress best: an urge followed by a declaration of war.) I'm talking three-, four-, and five-pound rainbow and cutthroat (maybe a brown or two. Can't remember...), even a 12-pounder.

That may in fact be the biggest payoff of all with streamer fishing: bigger fish. Big fish need a lot of meat in their diet to survive, and the little fish most streamer flies imitate provide that much better than do insects. All very logical.

If another reward of streamer fishing equals the poundage of the catch, it's got to be the fascination of working that meaty looking, swimming-fish fly down beyond sight and wondering what might grab it. Exciting stuff, especially after you've proven to yourself that streamers tempt the biggest trout in a river.

But just tossing out a streamer and making it jiggle aren't enough; you need effective and appropriate flies and proper tackle in order to get results. So...

TACKLE FOR STREAMERS

I'm something of a six-weight line and rod man anyway for trout (though I'll go lighter when conditions call for it), but for all-around streamer fishing I do think a six-weight system is best. Some length in the rod helps manipulate line

Photo by Rick Hafele



A heavy trout in the net is one major reward of streamer fishing.

and fly, so I prefer a rod of at least 8 1/2 feet, and 9 or 9 1/2 or even 10 feet are perhaps better. But remember: the longer the rod, the more force is required for each cast; you don't want a rod that tires your hand and wrist. Hard to beat 9 feet.

Photo by Rick Hafele



Among all those rods you'll find on you fly shop's racks, one with good power and casting six-weight lines, is great for streamer fishing.

A streamer rod needs some guts--good power overall for its line weight. Rod action is really a personal matter. Overall, though, for streamer fishing I like a rod neither really "fast," stiff in its lower two thirds, nor truly "slow," flexing right down to the grip even on a cast of modest distance. The very fast rod tends to snap the big streamer sharply around, which may break it off, and the truly slow rod just doesn't punch out the big fly as I want it to. So, a longish rod with a moderate to moderate-fast action and good power is, in my experience, ideal for streamer fishing in most situations.

Of course, you can fish streamers in creeks where a light, short rod may be just right, or even in spring creeks where lazy currents really change the rules--almost any rod can drop a small streamer on a small, glassy river. My recommendations above are for standard streamer fishing on rivers of good current and at least modest size.

Lines are a big deal in regards to streamer fishing. I use sink-tip lines almost exclusively for streamers in trout rivers (with, again, the exception of creeks and spring creeks and the like, where a floating line may be fine and a lightly weighted fly may get down properly on its own). If you're not familiar with sink-tip lines, they have a sinking front section followed by floating line. If you used a "full-sinking line," the sort that sink from end to end, commonly used in trout lakes, you'd find the near end of the line caught frequently on the riverbed. I haven't figured out how long a sinking tip I like yet, however.

And I've got a few different ones, most of which I've fish quite a bit. Among my current collection: a type III (sinks at a moderate rate), a 200 grain (*really* sinks), and a clear "lake line" I used on my latest trip (which sinks quite slowly and seems about right for slower shallower rivers, especially with a weighted streamer). There is a lake-line sink tip (I just don't happen to own one yet) and it would probably be a better choice than my full-

sinking lake line for rivers. I own other sink tips and have worn out a few others over the years, but that gives you some idea of what I have on hand.

To be honest, these lines have all served me well under varying conditions. If the river is big and powerful, I grab the 200 grain. If the river is smaller or slower or both, the type III. If it's a generally lazy tail-water stream the lake line (or even a full-floating line) and a weighted fly does the trick.

The sinking sections of my sink tips run from 15 feet to 30. Thirty can be a bit much on a river of modest size, so right now I'm preferring the 15-footers (I might even like a 10-foot sinking section better. Just not sure...).

Since I'm still playing with different sink-tips, I'll just say that right now I'd probably look for a type V sink-tip line with a 15-foot sinking section for all-around river streamer fishing for trout...if I had to choose. But I might give you a significantly different recommendation if you ask me again a year from now.

Leaders and tippet? First, diameter. I like a tapered leader with a 2X point, on which I'll put some 3X tippet. But if the odds of a really big trout whacking my streamer are high, I'll go up to 1X and 2X. Sound heavy? You bet. Go ahead and fish a streamer on 5X if you like. Then you can later tell me how long it took that insane five-pound rainbow to snap off your streamer. With flies that imitate quick little fishes, the strikes tend to be mean, and if there's a lot of meat behind those strikes...

Mind you, I will go lighter, grudgingly, if the trout are wise and the water is slow and clear. After all, those trout don't get any smaller just because the river's low.

Most streamer fishers prefer short leaders--six feet in all, down to a mere two feet. Of course in those low, clear flows I mentioned they might go longer. Personally, I go longer anyway, even with my stout tippets--I tend to think trout are more line-shy than tippet-shy. On average I'll go with around seven feet of tapered leader with two feet of tippet. I like to use tippet even with streamers (many don't) simply because I'd rather keep cutting tippet to replace flies than cutting--and thickening--tapered leader.

Photo by Rick Hafele



Choose a leader strong enough to handle large fish. A 7-foot, 2X tapered leader is a good place to start.

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THE ONLY KNOT

These days, I *always* tie on my streamers using the mono loop knot. It adds wiggle to any streamer, but streamers that carry a metal bead or cone for a head really shimmy with the freedom this knot provides.

FLIES

Consider first the assortment of fishes that streamer flies imitate. In trout rivers, baby trout always make sense, and I've come to imitate these almost exclusively with my Morris Minnows. You can find them in fly shops or on line as the Solitude Fly Company ties them on large hooks for large trout. If you want smaller ones you'll have to tie them yourself, at least for now. There of course are other effective little-trout patterns such as the Janssen's Minnow and the Clouser Minnow.

"Sculpin," dark little predator fishes that lie on riverbeds and dart with remarkable speed thanks to their great pectoral fins, provide a lot of meat for trout. It's still hard to beat the old reliable Muddler Minnow for imitating sculpin. I prefer the Marabou Muddler, however, with its soft billowing wing, and usually with a metal bead or cone for a nose to drive the fly down and make it swim. Lots of sculpin flies are now tied with heads of trimmed wool, and they're effective too.

Outside the West there are a variety of little fishes on which river trout feed: dace, shiners, chub... And though my streamer fishing has all been in the western US and Canada (for the record, I do fish the East and Midwest and South, just not with streamers so far), I know there are good flies for imitating these fishes too. Art Flick's Black-Nosed Dace is a longtime eastern standard. Beyond that you probably need first-hand advice on streamers for fishing outside the West. (Other than streamers that imitate the sculpin, a fish which seems to flourish in trout rivers everywhere in North America. So wherever you go on our broad continent, do carry a few Marabou Muddlers or the like.)

It's easy to write off the leech as a creature of lakes, but slow rivers may hold lots of leeches and if they do, the trout will watch for them--even one substantial leech provides a trout a big meal. I still like the Janssen Marabou Leech, but tend to use my Bonehead Leech more and more often.

Photo by Carol Ann Morris



A good trout displays the small Morris minnow that fooled him.

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RICK'S NEMESIS

My friend and fellow fly author Rick Hafele won't like hearing this, but attractor streamers can out fish imitative ones at times - trout are moody and unpredictable fish. I convinced myself of the value of attractor streamers long ago when a few very cautious spring-creek trout slammed my Black Ghost streamer--the Black Ghost is an old and old-style attractor pattern, and I tried it because nothing else was working. The Spruce Fly's another old timer worth carrying. And then there are all those variations on the Woolly Bugger...and they work too. Tim Heng came up with a wild and mildly complicated variation on the Woolly Bugger for his Colorado streams (but then, what fly isn't complicated next to the original Woolly Bugger?): the Autumn Splendor. Should be good about anywhere--after all, an attractor's an attractor, right?

Lines, flies, rods, reels, and the rest--I believe the principles I've given you for selecting your flies and tackle for streamer fishing are sound. But it's all subjective, really. If you want to fish a pendulous-slow rod and a full-floating line and some streamer fly unlike anything I've recommended, go ahead. Might be just the thing...

Photo by Carol Ann Morris



Streamer Fly Patterns

Fly Pattern Photos by Skip Morris



MARABOU MUDDLER, BROWN

HOOK: Heavy wire, 3X or 4X long, sizes 12 to 2.

WEIGHT: Lead or lead-substitute wire wound up the shank.

THREAD: Red 3/0 (I like size A rod thread for the head).

TAIL (optional): Red hackle fibers.

BODY: Gold Diamond Braid, wound.

WING: One brown marabou plume. Atop the marabou, a few strands of peacock herl.

HEAD and COLLAR: Natural deer hair.

Skip's *Fly Tying Made Clear and Simple II* provides detailed tying instructions for the Marabou Muddler and Morris Minnow.



BLACK NOSED DACE

Art Flick

HOOK: Heavy wire, 3X to 4X long, sizes 14 to 4

THREAD: Black 8/0, 6/0, or 3/0.

TAIL: Red wool trimmed short.

BODY: Flat or embossed silver tinsel.

WING: Bottom to top: white buck tail or calf tail, black buck tail, natural-brown buck tail.

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BONEHEAD LEECH Skip Morris

HOOK: Standard to heavy wire, 1X to 4X long, straight or slow-curve shank, ring (straight) eye, sizes 12 to 4.

WEIGHT: Lead or lead-substitute wire.

THREAD: Three-ought in the body's color.

TAIL and BODY: Marabou enclosing fine Mylar strands (Angel Hair, Lite Brite...). Make the tail, and then build the body in two or three more sections. Olive, black, tan, brown, red, purple...

HEAD: Dubbing in the body's color. Bind the dubbing thoroughly (heavy thread helps) and then bind one or two strands of Flashabou or Krystal Flash (body color, or a contrasting color) at the hook's eye, spiral the thread back to the rear of the head-area, spiral the Flashabou back over the head, bind the Flashabou. Coat the head with clear epoxy glue. (See my recommendations for epoxy on the next page under "Morris Minnow, Rainbow.")



AUTUMN SPLENDOR

Tim Heng

HOOK: Heavy wire, 3X long, sizes 12 to 4.

HEAD: A copper bead for sizes 12 to 8, 7/64-inch for size 12; 5/32-inch for sizes 10 and 8. A copper cone in medium for sizes 6; large for size 4.

WEIGHT: Lead or lead-substitute wire.

THREAD: Brown 3/0.

TAIL: Brown marabou, four to six strands of copper Krystal Flash along each side of the tail.

RIB: Small copper wire, wound forward through the hackle.

BODY: Brown medium chenille.

LEGS: Yellow rubber-strand, three strands bound crossways up the shank. Wind the chenille, hackle, and rib around the strands.

HACKLE: One dyed-yellow grizzly and one dyed orange grizzly, spiraled together down the body to the hook's bend, secured with the rib-wire, and then counter-wound with the rib.

COMMENTS: Legs, rib, chenille, hackle--the body can get a little tricky, but it's easier to make than you might think.



MORRIS MINNOW, RAINBOW Skip Morris

HOOK: Heavy wire, standard length to 3X long, ring (straight) eye (a wide-gape bass-bug hook is a sound option for larger sizes), sizes 12 to 4. (I like a slow-curve hook, such as the Daiichi 1260, for smaller sizes.)

WEIGHT: Windings of lead or lead-substitute wire under the head (a big metal bead or cone in place of the lead makes a lively fast-sinking fly).

THREAD: White or gray 3/0 (or finer for small hooks).

BODY: Sections of fine Mylar (Angel Hair, Lite Brite...), normally, three up the shank--pearl on the underside, silver doubled back along the sides, olive on top. Trim the Mylar to a fish-body shape. After the body is trimmed, add a couple of strands of red Flashabou along each side, and then build and complete the head.

HEAD: Gray or white dubbing over the lead wire to build a foundation. The final section of Mylar is built over this dubbing-foundation. Paint the head with kid's paint--poster paint, acrylic... Olive back, pink sides with red gill slashes, white underside, white eyes with black pupils, black spots on top and sides. Coat the head with clear epoxy glue. (I prefer a low-odor glue, such as Devcon 2-Ton Crystal Clear Epoxy--work with ventilation no matter what glue you use.)

Make an alternate head for large Morris Minnows by binding a short section of Mylar tubing behind the hook's eye, pushing the tubing back so that it turns inside out, coating the tubing with epoxy, trimming the rear of the tubing when the epoxy is half set, completing the head with paint and a second coating of epoxy.

DAVE HUGHES – STREAMER TACTICS

Photo by Rick Hafele



All photos by Dave Hughes except where noted

Fishing streamers effectively for trout can be broken into two simple parts. The first is getting the fly to the depth where you want it. The second is getting the fly to do what you want it to do when it gets there.

Getting to the right depth is mostly a matter of selecting the right fly lines. Of course you need a floater, wet-tip, wet-belly, wet-head, and Hi-Density full-sink lines, plus Types I, II, III, IV and V sinkers to choose from. If you calculate the cost of that, you'll quickly see that it's daunting. I'll admit to condensing the requirements in my own fishing. For the rod that I use for streamer fishing--which happens to be the same stout 9' 6-weight that I use for summer steelhead--I make sure

I'm armed with a floating line, a clear intermediate, and what I call a *depth charge* line. That is just three lines. The last is the fastest sinking line the rod will loft into the air and propel without whapping me in the back with my streamer.

The floating line is for fishing shallows, or for trout that are holding or cruising near the surface. I don't stretch that much; if trout are down more than a couple of feet, even though I can reach them with a floater, I'll switch it out. The floater is primarily for use where a line with any sink rate at all would get me into more trouble with the shallow bottom, with submerged weed beds, or with upthrust snags than it would get me into trouble with trout. I use the floating line to swing streamers across riffles. I use it to toss weighted streamers to the banks from a boat. I use it to fish shallow edge water in lakes. I use it to fish streamers to trout chasing sculpins on tailouts, or at the skinny edges of rivers and streams, mostly at evening...I'm sure it would work as well at dawn, but I'm normally drinking coffee and plotting the day just then.

The clear intermediate line is for most of my streamer fishing. If you haven't bought one and tried it yet, trot out and do so at once. You'll please the fly shop owner, which is a minor purpose here. Much more important, you'll please more trout, which is my major purpose. I bought my first clear intermediate for fishing lakes, and found it an eye-opener there. But I've been using it for more and more of my streamer fishing on moving water, and find that it's much more useful there than I thought. I use the intermediate line now in most situations where in the past I'd have used the floater. If the water is more than a couple of feet deep, or the trout are holding at more than that depth, I

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try to get the floater off and the intermediate on. My first and highest use for the intermediate line is trolling a streamer slowly while I explore a lake, whether I'm in my float tube, pontoon boat, or pram. I like to idle along, look around for rising trout, gaze at the shape of the lake, see where its structure might indicate I should fish. But most often, in truth, I figure out where to focus my fishing when my rod begins to dance, indicating my streamer has made contact with trout. Most of my lake and pond exploration is with that intermediate line and the streamer I tow behind it.

The intermediate is perfect for swinging streamers in riffles and runs that are two-to four-feet deep, which when you ponder it, is most of the moving water where we want to swing them. It's also excellent on still waters for fishing what I call *the bottom of the shallows*. Trout have moved into coves and along edges that are three to six feet deep, but because no insects are active at the moment, they're as deep as they can get, which isn't particularly deep. You can get a weighted streamer down to them perfectly with the intermediate line and about ten to twenty seconds of count-down patience.



An intermediate sinking line works well when fishing shallow riffles and runs in moving water.



A floating line works when trout are shallow in still waters, but an intermediate works better when no insects are active, and trout are on the bottom of those shallows.

The depth charge line--a Teeny 300 or Rio shooting head or similar heavy line from any manufacturer--is for use when the water is deep and the trout can't be found. You won't need it often on moving water, but when you do, nothing else will even nearly approach the fish, to show your streamer to them. I'll give you a remote example. I was on a river in Chile that was blown out by rain. It held trout, but they weren't moving around in that gray water. There was only one way to fish for them, and without a depth-charge line, that one way was out like the water. I had a Teeny 300, was able to cast long and slightly upstream with it, mend it down while a heavily-weighted streamer plunged.

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When the line came tight, I'd let the big fly simply swing around on the current, with no action added. Every once in awhile there would be a big thump, and a modest-size brown trout would come thrashing to the surface. Modest size trout weigh three or four pounds down there.



Photos by Masako Tani



Whether fishing in Chile (above and left) or a stream close to home, if the water is deep and off color, arm yourself with the fastest-sinking line your rod will carry, and add a streamer with some inherent weight to it, in order to get as deep as it's possible to get.

I use the depth-charge line more often on big lakes than I do on rivers. When trout suspend themselves around twenty to thirty feet down, a line that sinks abruptly is the best way to get a streamer to them. If trout are somewhere between the six-foot depth in which I use the intermediate and those deepest depths that I desire to fish, I can still get a streamer to the right depth by using the right count. Of course all those wet-tips, wet-heads, Type IIs and IIIs and IVs would fish the in-between depths at least as well, perhaps better. But then I'd have to buy them, and carry them, and switch back and forth between them...it's far easier to use a line that sinks through all those depths, and stop the count along the way if I don't want all the depth that the line offers me. Hence the depth-charge. I wouldn't want to take any extended trip without it.

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On big lakes, like this one in Canada, you can sometimes stimulate big trout into chasing down a streamer by retrieving it just as fast as you can...never let up; if you stop, it's not uncommon for chasing trout to turn away.

The way the streamer moves when you get it to the depth you want is obviously dependent on the type of retrieve you give it. There are no secrets here, but a quick review of basic retrieves won't hurt, and might help you corral some trout you otherwise might not.

The first and most elemental retrieve is no retrieve at all. Cast the streamer out--this works only on moving water, though you'll often catch trout on a streamer on the sink in still water as well--and let it swing down and around on the current. Don't animate it at all. Let the movement of the water give it all the action it's going to get. I used this non-retrieve to great effect when fishing Yamsi Ranch in southern Oregon, on the upper Williamson River. It's a spring creek of moderate size; trout hang out under fallen logs that lie across the current. The drill, taught to me by ranch owner John Hyde, was to cast a



On the Yamsi Ranch spring creek, trout hide under those sheltering logs. Your best ploy is to swim a streamer slowly across the entire length of them, as close to the bottom as you can get it.

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few feet upstream from the obvious lie, with a floating line because anything else would have simply plunked the fly on the bottom. While the weighted streamer sank at about the same pace it approached the log, I followed it with the rod tip. When it reached the face of the log, I stopped the rod, and the line tugged the streamer right across the hollow spot under the log...and as it turned out, right into the waiting jaws of some very nice brook trout that only Yamsi seems to own.



Masako Tani with a Yamsi Ranch brook trout that has some regrets about a streamer it ate.

My first discoveries with streamers were on big riffles and pools of the Big Hole River, near Melrose, Montana. It was the year I was released from employment with the millinery in SE Asia, and I spent three weeks camped in a cottonwood copse along the river. I caught most of my trout mindlessly swinging Muddlers on a floating line. It was just the therapy I needed at that moment. I caught lots of browns, some sixteen- and eighteen-inches long. But I wish I could go back to that place and time with a powerful rod and both intermediate and depth-charge lines. I'm guessing there were some heavyweights hanging under the shallow streamers I swept so high over their heads.

I sometimes add a pulse of the rod tip as my streamer swings, making it look like a minnow that is alternately darting, then stopping. This can goose some trout into action, especially in big pools that approach still waters.

In lakes and ponds, my most common way to fish streamers, as I've already said, is to tow them behind my conveyance while I explore for where I'd like to focus my fishing. I know trolling isn't considered sporting, but I like exploring, and I enjoy gazing around at the scenery while I do it, and I also am pleased by catching trout. Dragging a streamer behind whatever I'm floating around in is one of the most effective ways to combine all

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those pleasures. It's also a great way to find concentrations of trout. Then I can put on the brakes and fish for them the way some folks are certain I ought. You might be one of them.

Usually I use a slow strip when fishing streamers on still waters. It mimics the movements of most of the natural food forms that lake and pond trout feed upon. Sometimes it turns out to be just the right retrieve completely by accident. I fished a favorite lake one long-ago fall afternoon. Nothing was showing, so I strung a sinking line and tied on a small streamer, cast out, counted it down, then began slowly stripping it back. Soon it got whacked. I played out the trout, bonked it for dinner, cast and caught another, rapped it, too. That was enough. I caught a bunch more. When I cleaned the two trout later, I found each had eaten several hourglass-shaped dragonfly nymphs. How do they move? They jet along in short bursts, then take rest stops, just like a streamer fished with a slow strip.

More often than I'd care to confirm, I've caught trout in lakes on streamers fished as fast as I could make them go...zoom! I caught onto this when I once peered into a vast and clear Canadian lake and saw a big leech that must have been late for an appointment on the other side of the lake. It was undulating right along. I realized in that instant that a leech, given the need, can really scoot. And what might prompt that need more than a trout on its tail? I understand that leeches are blind, but I give them credit for senses that might tell them trout are after them, and that they might kick in their afterburners on arrival of that bad news.

I started fishing every third or fifth or tenth cast--it depends on the pace of the action and the state of my inattention--with as fast a strip as I could manage. I was surprised the first time it worked. Because I used a floating line, and the streamer had no choice but to fish shallow at such astonishing speed, I was able to see the wake of a trout well up behind it. I wasn't prepared for the size thump that followed. I snapped the fly off. I stoutened my tippet to 3X, and have to admit that in the next hour I discovered that it's a different kind of thrill to watch the wakes of three- and four-pound trout arrow at your fly, chase them down and kill it, than it is to fish streamers more sedately.



Try it next time you're bored. Don't blame me if you lose some streamers.

RICK HAFELE – STREAMERS: WHAT THE...?

Photo by Mark Bachmann



(All photos by Rick Hafele except where noted)

I have a confession to make - I almost never fish streamers. I know they work. Work really well in fact, as I've had great success fishing with streamers on those rare occasions when I've put one on. But those occasions are few and far between, and my selection of streamer patterns is pretty dismal. I blame it on my bug focus. There are some really good hatches in the fall, and I just can't help myself when I see mayflies or caddisflies taking off the surface or dipping back down to it and trout barking at them like terriers at a door-to-door salesman. So to be honest, I'm at a loss to tell you anything about about fishing streamers that Skip and Dave haven't already covered. I could just quit here and let this issue rest on the streamers

of Skip and Dave, but that doesn't seem right. So, I'm going to take a sharp turn and instead of making something up about my expertise at streamer fishing, I'm going to discuss one of fall's important hatches that often gets little attention: Mahogany duns, or for those who prefer latin, *Paraleptophlebia*. So take off that clear intermediate sinking line and put your floating line back on.

Mahogany dun, like many common names used by fly fishers, does not refer to just one species. In this case a mahogany dun can be one of over 39 species of *Paraleptophlebia*. Many of these species are rare and not important to fly fishers, but a number of species are widespread and abundant. In the East and Midwest the most important species are *P. adoptiva*, *P. mollis*, and *P. debilis*. In the West the major species are *P. temporalis*, *P. gregalis*, *P. debilis*, and *P. bicornuta*.

The genus *Paraleptophlebia* belongs to the family Leptophlebiidae, of which *Leptophlebia* is the other major genus. This family falls into the "crawler" group of mayflies. Other important families of crawlers include Ephemerellidae, Leptohyphidae (formerly Tricorythodidae), and Caenidae. Compared to the dominant hatches of the family Ephemerellidae (pale morning duns, green drakes, Hendricksons, etc.), *Paraleptophlebia* hatches are not as well known or understood. However, with 39 species of *Paraleptophlebia* scattered across the country and good populations occurring in most trout streams, this is a group one should become familiar with and be ready to imitate when they are available.

Recognizing *Paraleptophlebia* from other mayflies is relatively easy. The most distinctive feature of nymphs is their slender forked (often called "tuning fork") gills on abdominal segments 1-7. Nymphs also have three prominent tails of equal length. Nymphs overall

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appear rather delicate, especially when compared to the more robust nymphs of the family Ephemerellidae. The western species, *P. bicornuta*, has unique mandibles that form large sickle shaped tusks projecting out in front of the head. Mature nymphs have well formed black wingpads and reach lengths of six to about ten millimeters excluding their tails (1/4 - 3/8 inches). Most nymphs will be light tan to brown in color.



Two different species of Mahogany dun nymphs. *P. bicornuta* (bottom) shows its distinctive sickle-shaped mandibles. Both show the key features of *Paraleptophlebia* nymphs: slender body, three tails, and slender "tuning-fork" shaped gills.



Adults (both duns and spinners) have three tails, a feature common to all crawlers and one that clearly separates them from the two-tailed adults of the swimmer and clinger groups of mayflies. To separate *Paraleptophlebia* from other look-a-like crawlers of the family Ephemerellidae look closely at their hind wings. The hind wings of *Paraleptophlebia* will have an evenly rounded leading edge with no hump known as a costal angulation.



Male dun (left) and female spinner (right).

All species of Ephemerellidae have this raised hump on the leading edge of the hind wing. Both male and female duns of *Paraleptophlebia* have a rich brown (mahogany) body color and solid gray wings. Color, however, often differs between male and female spinners. Females retain a uniform reddish brown color. The males of many species, however, have a dark brown thorax and nearly clear white abdomen that gives them an almost ghost-like appearance when dancing in mating swarms over the water. (Note: males of *P. adoptiva* remain a uniform reddish brown color like the females.) Like the nymphs, duns and spinners will range in length from six to just over ten millimeters excluding tails.

The timing of mahogany dun hatches varies with species and location, with some of the best hatches split between spring and fall. For example, the eastern/midwestern species *P. adoptiva* produces strong hatches in the spring, while *P. debilis* provides the action throughout September and October. Similarly the western species *P. gregalis* hatches from late March through mid May, followed by *P. debilis* and *P. bicornuta* in September and October.

In both seasons mahogany duns often get overlooked because other larger or more active insects are often on the water at the same time. But like happens so often in fishing, trout frequently ignore the obvious for what seems to be less abundant and less important. Another reason they may go unnoticed is that they almost always emerge from quiet, slow-flowing areas of streams either near shore or in side channels and backwaters. The nymphs, which live most of their lives in the main stream where moderate currents and small gravel or aquatic plants prevail, migrate to slower water areas before emergence begins. As a result unless you look carefully in water that often goes unfished, you will fail to see some nice trout feeding quietly on these duns and miss some fine fishing.



Slow moving streams with rich growths of aquatic plants provide good habitat for Paraleptophlebia nymphs, but they also live in faster water streams (below) as well. Wherever they are found nymphs typically move to gentle currents near shore before emerging.



As members of the crawler group of mayflies, *Paraleptophlebia* nymphs are not fast swimmers when compared to true swimmers like *Baetis*. Overall *Paraleptophlebia* nymphs prefer to stay hidden among aquatic plants or other debris on the stream bottom, but when they find themselves in open water they move with a snakelike side-to-side wiggle. Their progress is relatively slow, and it is easy to see why they find slow currents preferable. Despite their moderate swimming ability, nymphs

become quite restless just prior to emergence and often make several practice swims towards the surface for up to an hour before they actually emerge. Finally the nymphs leave the bottom for good and swim to surface where the duns emerge in the film. All this activity prior to emergence makes nymphs quite vulnerable to feeding fish.

During emergence the duns also become easy targets for fish. They often float long distances before flying. On the smooth flat surfaces, typical of the areas *Paraleptophlebia* emerge from, this behavior often creates selective feeding. Look for the heaviest hatches to occur between mid-morning and late afternoon depending on weather and time of year. Warm weather will push the hatch to the morning hours, while overcast or cool weather will move the hatch to the mid or late afternoon. The time of year emergence occurs varies

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with the species. Species like *P. adoptavia* and *P. temporalis* emerge in the spring. Other species like *P. debilis* and *P. bicornuta* emerge in the late summer and fall continuing to hatch through October.

A few hours after emergence, spinners begin swarming and mating. Lehmkuhl and Anderson described this mating activity in detail in a scientific journal article as follows:



A late afternoon swarm of spinners in flight.

Within 3-4 minutes after the sun ceased shining on the water's surface, groups of 30-40 males appeared and swarmed 2-4 feet above the water, about 2-10 feet from shore. The dance was performed by the male repeatedly fluttering rapidly upward 4-5 feet above the water, then the wings and cerci were spread, the forelegs were stretched far forward, and they floated down until they were about 2 feet above the surface. Occasionally they fell into the water and usually could not free themselves.

Females appeared about 30 minutes after the males began to swarm. When a female entered a swarm she was immediately grasped by a male. The pair lost altitude and copulation was completed in the time it took them to fall 3 feet. The pair then separated and the female immediately began skipping across the surface of the water depositing eggs. She dropped to the surface of the water, dipped the tip of her abdomen, flew about 2 feet into the air, and dropped again..... The time from the first contact between male and female until the last of the eggs were laid was only a few seconds."

The low water conditions common in the late summer and fall produce challenging conditions for fishing *Paraleptophlebia* patterns. Try nymph patterns first, before the duns start floating on the surface. A small size 16 pheasant tail sparsely dressed often works well. The naturals are in slow water areas, so concentrate your fishing in backwater eddies and the edges of riffles and flats. An upstream, or up and across presentation normally works best, but a down and across cast can prove to be just as useful. Strikes will usually be subtle making a strike indicator a good idea. Nymph patterns will continue to be effective during the early part of the hatch when nymphs are rising and floating near the surface.

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Once duns start drifting in good numbers fishing dries becomes very effective. One of my favorite patterns is a size 16 compara-dun with a dark brown body and gray wing. A Harrop dun or parachute pattern also work well. The selective nature of the feeding that often occurs during these hatches means you will want a fly pattern that closely matches the size and silhouette of the natural. Duns also struggle on the surface getting their wings ready for flight, so it's not uncommon to see a good number of cripples on the surface. When this happens you might find a less imitative pattern, like a soft hackle, works better than a traditional dun pattern. The slow smooth currents where *Paraleptophlebia* hatch also requires delicate presentations with no drag. A downstream slack-line cast will often produce the best results for this type of fishing.



Unable to get his wings free from the water's surface this crippled dun becomes an easy prey for trout.



The soft rise of a spinner-feeding trout can easily go unnoticed.

Spinner falls are not as predictable as the dun emergence. Be on the lookout for them late in the day when the sun is off the water. If you see a good number on the surface - you'll need to look closely and may only see the quiet disturbance of rising trout - they will be important to imitate. A lightly tied poly-wing spinner with a reddish-brown body is generally all that is needed. Like most

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spinner fishing, presentation is the key to success. Cast your fly a few feet above a fish you've seen rising. Make sure the line, leader, and fly land softly; remember this will usually be in smooth relatively slow moving water, so surface disturbance will easily spook surface feeding fish. Last, you must avoid drag to your fly of any kind. A long tippet of three or four feet will help as will a slack-line downstream presentation. Rises to your fly will be gentle and slow, so don't strike hard or fast.

When you face tough fishing conditions this fall, take a look in some areas you generally don't fish. Carefully watch backwaters and flats with gentle currents for the small dark bodies of mahogany duns drifting quietly on the surface. Further observation may reveal the subtle rises of confidently feeding trout, and some exciting opportunities for fish.



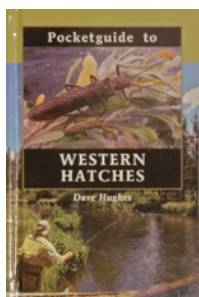
Be prepared with nymph (middle), dun (bottom), and spinner (top) patterns. Pay close attention to size and general color as these will vary between species.

The trout caught during a Mahogany dun hatch may not be as big as a streamer-caught brown, but they will be just as satisfying.

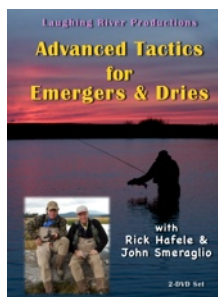


News from Dave, Rick, & Skip!

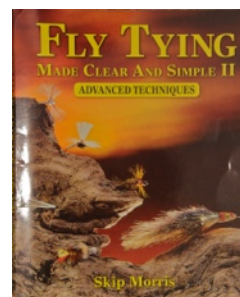
RECENT BOOK & DVD RELEASES



Dave's newest book, *Pocketguide to Western Hatches*, just out September 2011, is now available.--\$21.95--Stackpole Books, 2011



Rick's newest instructional DVD (2-disc set) with John Smeraglio titled, *Advanced Tactics for Emergers & Dries*, is now available. Order it online at www.laughingrivers.com or get at your local fly shop. \$29.95 - Laughing River Productions, 2011



Skip's latest book, *Fly Tying Made Clear and Simple II, Advanced Techniques*, offers thorough instructions for tying many great patterns for fussy trout. Frank Amato Pub, 2009

To learn more about Dave, Skip, and Rick's latest publications, where they are speaking, or to book them for your own program , go to their personal websites at:

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